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ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the anecdotal evidence of unexpected problems that emerged in two mass communication projects in Central America. The aim is to highlight the most salient "people-related" issues faced by mass communication evaluation researchers who work in alien cultures. The paper argues that graduate students in schools of journalism and mass communication are well trained in theory, methods, and statistical analysis but are not so well prepared to deal with the obstacles put up by people and the organizations they represent in field settings. The paper states that this problem is particularly true for those who intend to work in evaluation research in developing countries. The two projects discussed in the paper dealt with non-formal community educational radio and were located in isolated regions of Nicaragua and Honduras. Personal experiences of the author during these projects are recounted while observations drawn from literature that addresses evaluation research are integrated in the text. The paper makes the case that the field of journalism and mass communication needs to prepare graduates better to handle these "people-related" issues. (Thirteen notes are included.) (MS)

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Conducting Evaluation Research Abroad: Some Things They Don't Exactly Tell You

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Submitted to the Qualitative Studies Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication for presentation at the annual meeting, Portland, Oregon, July 2-5, 1988.

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ABSTRACT

Graduate students in schools of journalism and mass communication are well trained in theory, methods and statistical analysis. They are not so well prepared to deal with the obstacles put up by people and the organizations they represent in field settings. This is particularly true for those who intend to work in evaluation research and more particularly true for those who intend to work in developing countries. Drawing from two radio projects she has been involved with in Central America and from literature that addresses evaluation research, the author makes the case that our field needs to better prepare graduates for these "people-related" issues. To do that, we need a frank discussion of what those issues are.

Submitted to the Qualitative Studies Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication for presentation at the annual meeting, Portland, Oregon, July 2-5, 1988.

**Conducting evaluation research abroad:
some things they don't exactly tell you**

Men who are now professors teach their students as their professors taught them, and if young field workers do not give up in despair, go mad, ruin their health, or die, they do, after a fashion, become anthropologists.

Margaret Mead[1]

Introduction

The teaching of anthropological methods has not changed much since the early part of the century, laments Margaret Mead in her autobiography, Blackberry Winter, published in 1972. Then and now, she says, students received good training in theory but were then sent "among primitive people with the expectation that [they] would work out everything" for themselves.[2]

The teaching of anthropology field methods has undoubtedly changed in the 16 years since the publication of Blackberry Winter, but Mead's assessment is still valid, especially for mass communication programs.

Anyone who has ventured to a foreign clime to conduct research has a bag full of captivating anecdotes about unexpected obstacles. Sometimes these tales are humorous. Sometimes they are frightening. Sometimes they exude frustration. The tales concern traveling, eating, drinking (or not drinking), encountering folks of a very different stripe, dealing with bureaucrats, and coping with a range of challenges other researchers rarely face. Many of the stories have to do with the exotic in terms of place. Many of the stories have to do with the unforeseen behavior of people critical to the research.

Unfortunately, the people-connected obstacles to research, though likely critical to how the researcher accomplishes the job, usually are not recorded in research papers or methods books of our field. Rather, the tales become part of the folklore surrounding a particular individual, surrounding a particular mass communication program. The unfortunate result for those interested in pursuing such field work is that valuable practical information is lost. As Mead suggested, novices are almost certain to be groping in the dark when confronted with the range of uncontrollables one faces in deepest Third World.

Purpose

A key element missing in the methods training of mass communication scholars is that of personal experiences. This omission is particularly relevant in the area of field research. Only when we're honest about -- and systematically report about -- the inevitable roadblocks we face abroad can we hope to train people who can truly advance our knowledge about communication issues.

The purpose of this paper is to chronicle the anecdotal evidence of unexpected problems that emerged in two mass communication projects in Central America. The aim is to highlight the most salient people-related issues faced by mass communication evaluation researchers who work in alien cultures. These personal experiences will be supplemented by observations of others, especially those of Weiss, Rutman, Punch and Kearl.[3]

I've chosen to focus on people issues for two reasons. One is that most graduates of good mass communication programs are pretty well versed in the literature of the field and the rudiments of methodology and statistical analysis, but not at all -- or at least not much -- in ways to

deal with the various people and the institutions they represent. The second reason is that it is precisely these people, and their institutions, who can enhance or jeopardize the best of an evaluator's plans.

My hope is that the paper may serve as a practical guide to some who are embarking on field work. It may also strike some familiar chords with the veterans.

The projects

A brief description of the similarities and differences of the two Central American projects will help set the stage. Both projects dealt with non-formal community educational radio. Both radio stations were located in isolated regions of their countries, one on the east coast of Nicaragua, the other on the east coast of Honduras. Both stations had similar aims: to provide relevant development and cultural information to the people of the region. Both broadcast in several languages, including Miskito, the primary language of the indigenous people along the east coast of Honduras and Nicaragua. Both radio stations were funded through AID (Agency for International Development) grants and implemented by non-profit, private voluntary organizations (PVOs) based in the United States.

Despite these similarities, the two projects differed in important ways. The Nicaraguan project, Radio VER (Voz Educativa Regional), operated on a shoestring budget as compared with Sani Radio in Honduras. The management philosophy of VER's implementors, including the author, was much in keeping with the limited budget: to do as much as possible at the grassroots level, from the hiring and training of staff to the purchase of supplies to the building of the station, recording studio and antenna.

The Honduran station, by contrast, began its life on something of a financial windfall. As a result, outside expertise was sought and used and much of the equipment came, ready made, from outside the country.

More importantly, the two projects were products of different decades, decades of significance in Central America. Radio VER began just as the Somoza government began to crumble. The first planning trip left the implementors stranded on Nicaragua's east coast when La Prensa editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was assassinated in Managua Jan. 10, 1978, and when the resulting turmoil curtailed all public transportation within the country. (Chamorro's death is considered by many as the trigger to the end of Somoza's rule.) The beginning of on-site work during the summer of 1978 coincided with the Sandinista taking of the National Palace, the second major event in the fall of the government, which came the following summer.

Sani Radio, by contrast, is a product of the mid-1980s. By 1985, the normally sleepy eastern region of Honduras had seen some major changes. By then, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was aiding about 30,000 Nicaraguan refugees in the area. The influx of people was straining the ecological and political system. Contra activity, which had begun in the early 1980s, continued. Still, there was no sense of imminent, radical change, as in the Nicaragua of the late 1970s.

Today Radio VER (now called VPP, Voz del Poder Popular) broadcasts under the auspices of the Nicaraguan government; Sani Radio is under the hands of a Honduran non-governmental development organization. The evaluation of Sani Radio is ongoing at this writing.

Definition

The focus of the paper is evaluation research. Evaluation research has been defined as:

> . . . first and foremost, a process of applying scientific procedures to accumulate reliable and valid evidence on the manner and extent to which specified activities produce particular effects or outcomes.[4]

The emphasis in this definition is on sound procedures. However, in practice the term also connotes a heavy overlay of utilitarianism. Evaluators design and conduct studies for program planners (and often funders) to provide information to be used to determine the future of a project. If the project is doing what it was set up to do, funding may well be renewed. If things have gone awry, an evaluation may provide information for a course correction. Or the final report may ring the death knell of the endeavor.

The fact that evaluation research is conducted with the aim of providing information impinging on the fate of a project sets the process apart from "pure" research. Evaluation research is also different in that it takes place in an "action setting," not a lab or a library.[5] It is in this action setting, especially in developing countries, that one confronts the range of people issues.

Evaluation research in developing countries: major obstacles

Weiss discusses three "features of the action setting" she says may cause major problems for the researcher.[6] Although she writes about evaluation research in general, her comments are applicable here. The three issues: 1) relationships between evaluators and program personnel, 2) the tendency of the program to change while the evaluation is under way and

3) the consequences of the fact that the program is embedded in a particular organizational system. Each of these boasts a people connection. This paper will include point 3 in a more general category, labeled "miscellaneous people-related uncontrollables."

Relationships between evaluators and program personnel

Under a section titled "Consultants, The Care and Feeding of," an Agency for International Development manual outlines steps the "action office" (not to be confused with the action setting) should follow to provide an evaluation consultant with the project information and assistance needed to carry out the job.[7] At the heart of the discussion is the idea that the Mission and the consultant work closely throughout the process -- from design to submission of the final report.

Ideally, that's the way it works. But in reality, sometimes things are different. Sometimes a close relationship never develops. Sometimes the researcher finds he or she has more than one boss. Sometimes those bosses have different ideas about what's to be evaluated. Sometimes those bosses even have different timetables for getting the work completed.

The Honduran project provides a good example. I was hired by one of the well-known consulting agencies in Washington to design and carry out an "impact" evaluation for AID. The radio had been broadcasting for a little more than one year when my contract was written. The station had operated under the auspices of a U.S. private voluntary organization for two years (one year of planning and one year on the air) but was in the process of being transferred to a Honduran organization involved with a variety of nationwide educational efforts. That organization, not surprisingly, was

heavily funded by AID. Both AID and the Honduran organization needed information to determine if the radio station was worth continued funding. The situation was complicated a bit by the fact that the Honduran organization was run by a 38-member board of directors that consisted of the most powerful men -- no women -- in Honduras.

Thus, the question: Who is my boss? The consulting agency? AID? The Honduran organization? The board of directors of the Honduran organization? What about the managers of the community radio station itself?

On paper, the answer is the funding agency, AID. But as it has turned out, the answer is all of the above, but all of the above in different strengths. The challenge has been three-fold: 1) figuring out the degree of strength (or power) of each boss, 2) assessing the goals -- stated and unstated -- of each, and 3) devising a research strategy that meets the interests of everyone without compromising the need for sound research procedures.

Fortunately, the system has proved quite amiable and fairly understandable. This is not always the case. The program officer at the Washington consulting firm is organized, utterly competent and a master at balancing the interests of the different parties. She also has first-hand experience in Honduras. My boss at AID has a Ph.D. in mass communications, a rarity in this sort of work. He also has hears of experience in communication and education projects in developing countries. Thus, he is familiar with both ideals and realities. The AID man and the head of the Honduran organization seem to work closely together and seem to see the goals of the radio project in much the same way. Out on the coast, the radio station's direction seems willing to do what he's told. (That's not

ideal in a bigger sense of what the evaluation is all about, but it happens to be true.)

My assessment of the power of the various parties is that satisfying the points of the contract -- and thus the aims of AID -- would, for the most part, satisfy the goals of all parties.

The second part of the challenge -- assessing the competing goals of the various parties -- may or may not be a major task. Either way, it's critical to understand who wants what. (See Maurice Punch, The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork, for one poignant tale of what happens when one doesn't understand the competing interests.[8]) In the Honduran example, what seemed fairly clear at the beginning turned into a changing scene as time progressed. Because of this shifting, the entire design strategy of the evaluation (point 3 above) changed.

Here's what happened. The board of directors of the organization that runs the radio -- those politically powerful 38 individuals -- turned out to be individuals with conflicting interests. Among those interests was one that concerned who should be the main chief in the organization. When my part in the project began, two men sat at the helm, each with his supporters and each with his piece of the empire. It was clear (even to an outsider) that eventually one would emerge the head. What wasn't clear was on what basis the decision would be made.

That's still not precisely clear. Nor is it clear who will emerge. What is evident is that the man in charge of the project I'm evaluating is gathering all the information he can to strengthen his hand. One part of that ammunition is the data from the radio evaluation. I'd be naive to assume that he hopes the data reflect negatively on his project.

The impact, then, on me and on the evaluation has to do with time: simply, the sooner the better. He wants a final report as soon as possible. Through negotiation and compromise, we agreed on a tentative date. The other parties did not object. And that date has changed the entire plan of action.

Shifting programs: the human effect on evaluation design

As Rutman outlines so well,[9] creating an evaluation design rests on the articulation of a series of issues, from specifying the components of the program; to specify the goals; to specifying the independent, intervening and dependent variables.

What Rutman doesn't talk about is what the evaluator does when the ground rules change midcourse, when what might have been an adequate design must be altered because of some unforeseen event. Nor does he talk about the constraints a "part-time" evaluator is likely to face because of his or her "full-time" job back home.[10]

Both Sani Radio and Radio VER provide useful examples. The initial contract for Sani Radio called for a three-part evaluation. Part I was to conduct a "signal coverage test." This seemed the simplest of tasks. AID wanted me to set up a system to monitor the radio broadcasts for strength and clarity over a period of one or two months. The goal was to gather data from different areas around Honduras.

Part II of the contract asked for a "key informant study." The idea here was to interview opinion leaders around the region where the radio station broadcast. These were to be open-ended interviews to learn views about the role of the station in the community and region and to get

suggestions on how the station might better serve the region in terms of development issues.

Part III called for a "listenership survey." Here the plan was to draw up a profile of listeners and non-listeners in terms of demographic details, listening patterns and program preference. The contract also asked for an indication of "knowledge gain" and "behavior change." I planned to measure change by a routine before-after procedure. The project had to be designed so that in-country site work could be conducted during my academic holidays and semester breaks.

I planned the evaluation to meet both my vacation schedule and the needs of the various parties calling for the evaluation. That meant Trip 1 -- nine days at Thanksgiving -- was to meet the Honduran cast of characters, both in Tegucigalpa and at the radio station on the coast; gather the pertinent background information; and prepare an evaluation plan outline agreeable to all.

Trip 2 -- 12 days after the subsiding of Christmas holidays in Honduras -- was to complete the evaluation instruments and get them translated into the national language and the local language, find and train interviewers for the field, pretest the various questionnaires, select the villages for the "key informant" and "listener survey" interviews, figure out the sampling plan, figure out the transportation plan to the villages and oversee the duplication of the questionnaires.

Trip 3 -- two weeks at spring break -- was to conduct the interviews in the field.

Trip 4 -- early summer -- was for a second wave of interviews to get at those questions of behavior change and knowledge gain. Following that

I'd take the completed questionnaires back to my university to analyze the data and to write the final report.

A lot of work crammed into four short trips, I realized. But the plan could work. The budget allowed for the four trips, the overall timetable allowed for such a plan. Everyone involved agreed the schedule was fine.

A couple of weeks before the first trip things began to change. A call from the Washington consulting firm informed me that more money had been added to the original budget. The extra money would enable an informal valuation of a rural agricultural weekly newspaper that the same organization had been selling throughout the country for a couple of years. A second consultant would accompany me on the first trip out to the coast. Her job would be to get a sense of the distribution and use of the newspaper in that region. This consultant had earlier conducted a formal evaluation of the newspaper in much of the rest of Honduras.

The idea of a companion who knew at least some of the key people involved and who had done a substantial amount of field work in Honduras and elsewhere in the world appealed to me for a number of reasons. The most important is that I've found that there is nothing more valuable than having two minds working on the same problems.

That said, the change in plan meant one less trip to Honduras for me. It meant a change in design. The new design -- developed during the course of the Thanksgiving trip -- was less pristine, but certainly more practical. The new plan, too, seemed to meet the approval of all the parties.

When I arrived in the capital for Trip 2, I learned more about the rift between the two directors of the organization. That's when I learned more about the power of the organization's board of directors. That's when

the Honduran director overseeing the radio told me he really would like to have the final report by March.

(As an aside, I should say I have a great deal of respect for the integrity and competence of this man and for his interest in the future of the radio station. There was no question that I would figure out how to do the best I could within the new constraint. I can imagine, however, that my response might be different given a different situation, given a different director.)

At that point, a major compromise was in order. The question: What elements of design and, ultimately, control could be compromised? I decided -- and I had the afternoon before the World War II-vintage DC-3 left for the coast to make up my mind -- my expertise would best be used in detailing and participating in all the preplanning activities, including the questionnaire design, the training of interviewers, the pretesting of the instruments and the design of the sampling plan. The compromise -- and loss of control -- was that I would not participate in the village interviewing visits. Whomever I hired to manage those visits would be responsible for getting the data to me, and I would analyze it and write the final report.

In the case of the Nicaraguan project and evaluation, which began in 1978, the program continually shifted, from the time of the signing of the implementation contract until the last of the interviews were completed, three and a half years later. The overriding causes, for both the implementation of the program and for the evaluation, was the storm leading to the revolution, the revolution itself and events in the aftermath. Since the evaluation was quite interwoven with the project implementation itself,

separating the two for discussion is probably not important. The worsening conditions in the country through the fall, winter and spring of 1978-79 affected the project at several levels.

At the national level -- the level of funding and oversight by AID -- the changes ranged from small to substantial. The small had to do with changing personnel. During the course of nine months, our project found itself under the management of three different AID monitors. As the State Department deemed the country increasingly unsafe, more U.S. citizens were withdrawn from the country. By the time I left in June 1979, only a skeleton staff remained at AID/Managua.

The project also was affected monetarily from the national level. One-third of the funding was to come from the Nicaraguan government; the salaries for all the Nicaraguan employees were to be paid from the Ministry of Education, as well. However, with national resources reallocated for defense purposes, our small project found itself at the bottom of any priority list the government may have had. As a result, the radio staff's employees worked for months at a time on only the promise that a salary would be forthcoming.

At the local level, the turmoil in the rest of the country affected the project and the evaluation. Parts and supplies were unavailable for building the station, the transmitter and the antenna. Travel to the capital was restricted. A national state of siege and press censorship prevented the flow of any reliable news to the coast.

The evaluation design called for Time 1 interviews in three Miskito villages during the fall of 1978 and Time 2 interviews (a matched-pair design) during the summer of 1979, some months after the radio had been broadcasting the educational material. The initial village trips were

postponed somewhat because of the fighting on the Pacific coast and the subsequent requests by the AID office that we stay close to home on the East Coast until some calm returned to the capital.

In our growing fear about our personal fates and the fate of the nation, this several-week delay seemed at the time to be a major decision. In retrospect, the postponement was but a minor blip in what became a complete overhaul of both implementation and evaluation. Because of a host of unforeseen delays -- all connected to the war -- the station aired its first broadcast in May, six months behind schedule. Then came what became known as the Final Offensive, the Sandinistas' last push into Managua, the movement that finally pushed Somoza from the country and brought the Sandinistas to power. By the end of May -- we'd been on the air for only two weeks -- we had no choice but to shut down the station. I hiked out of the country to Honduras, and the station remained off the air until the government took power in mid-July. Clearly, no post-test could be conducted soon. In fact, the resampling in the Miskito villagers didn't occur until January 1981, a year and a half after the change in government.

To say that some unplanned interventions occurred during that year and a half would be an understatement. With the change in government came a politicization of all aspects of life on the East Coast.

That politicization affected the programming (some of which was an independent variable in the original evaluation design). The politicization affected the management of the station. A new director replaced the old, but he soon found himself in disfavor with the new local junta. Several times during the next year and a half, the director scrapped with the junta to keep the station open. Twice local residents demonstrated successfully against government restrictions on radio programming.

The politicization also affected the general information environment in the region. The Sandinista government established its own radio stations, one of which offered some broadcasts in Miskito. The Sandinistas brought Cuban teachers and Cuban medical people to the villages; further, they posted soldiers along the river separating Honduras and Nicaragua. For the Miskito and Creole people of the region, all this meant a range of significant social, economic and cultural changes. For the evaluation, all this meant a complete lack of control over the information (the intervention) people received. It also meant, ironically, that our control village, on the river divided the countries, chosen because of its utter isolation, suddenly became a site of much activity and much information flow.

Issue #3: Miscellaneous people related uncontrollables

The best laid plans probably never are carried out without some molding by unforeseen happenings. I suspect, though I have no evidence of this, that these "uncontrollables" seem all the more uncontrollable in a foreign setting. One learns with experience to expect the unexpected.

Uncontrollables come in different guises. Further, some are more uncontrollable than others. An act of God -- the earthquake that devastated the capital and pretty much wiped out a test region of an education radio project in Guatemala in the 1970s[11] -- is truly uncontrollable. Likewise, a researcher probably has little influence over the course of a civil war. Sani Radio in Honduras provides several examples of controllable uncontrollables. Or let's just call them unforeseen challenges.

Two of the early challenges I've already mentioned: The addition of a colleague with the deletion of one country visit and change of the design

of the evaluation; the change of heart of the organization's director and the subsequent (second) change of evaluation design.

A third challenge has to do with a changing personnel at the radio station. Project people may not come and go more frequently in developing countries, but when trained people are in short supply, the loss of a key person can be a major setback.

One concept that frequently makes its way into development project literature is "institutionalization." As the term is often used, it means building the expertise of the outsiders into the in-country organization. It may mean establishing "counterparts" for each person who comes in from the outside. The idea is that the two individuals work side by side, each learning from the other. It's an idea with a lot of merit.

I'd first hoped to establish a counterpart role with the person assigned by the organization to be its liaison with the radio station. Honduras, like many other developing countries, is a place divided. Indigenous groups are considered fourth-world people by most of the rest of the population. Sani Radio was set up as a community effort at development in such a fourth-world indigenous area. The best of institutionalization would be to bring the capital city fellow out to the rural area, I thought. But, for a reason I don't know, the director in the capital nixed this idea -- perhaps because the individual was needed for work back in the capital.

My second choice was a former Peace Corps volunteer who had been living in the region for a number of years: the former director of the station, a man married to a Miskito woman, a man fluent in both Spanish and Miskito. Since stepping down as a director, he had been heading the group

preparing educational programs to be broadcast for school children. During the Thanksgiving trip, he was helpful and quite interested in the evaluation.

Unfortunately, by early January -- a little more than a month later -- he no longer worked at the station. The news came as a surprise to me when I arrived in the coastal town with my tight schedule and my detailed plan in hand. It seems he'd had a dispute over his contract. He'd not signed a new one, and he'd gone off to the village where his wife was from. I'm still not sure why my contacts in the capital didn't know all this. They later claimed to be as surprised as I was.

The lesson is never to pin one's hopes on one person. Keep a notebook filled with alternatives for every key position. My immediate solution was to scramble to find someone else. This, to my amazement, turned out to be possible. The recruit was a Peace Corps volunteer working with another development organization in town. Not only did he search for opportunities to get out to the villages; he also was fluent in both languages. Better yet, he turned out to be an eager student of my four-day field methods 101 course.

Another challenge that arises in various ways concerns people and internal politics, akin to Weiss' third issue (the consequences of the fact that the program is embedded in a particular organizational system). "To a greater or lesser extent, 'politics' suffuses all sociological research," says Punch in his The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork.[12] "By 'political' I mean everything from the micropolitics of personal relations, the cultures and resources of research units and universities, to the powers and policies of government research departments, and ultimately even the state

itself." In the setting of a developing country, even the micropolitics may become macropolitics.

In Honduras, the jockeying for leadership in the radio's overseeing organization certainly qualifies as politics: politics at the national and institutional levels. Out on the coast, I discovered another level of politics, which likewise affected the research. The station's director was himself something of a political appointee. It seemed that even though he was not well respected by a number of people connected with the station, he was a powerful figure. "His" people fared well; others did not.

It turned out that four of "his" people were selected to work as interviewers for the evaluation. My original plan was to employ the radio station's correspondents, who spent much of their time in the villages digging up and producing news and culture programs. In my grand scheme, training them in the rudiments of field survey research would be another useful step in institutionalization.

Exactly why these individuals were not available for the evaluation I still don't know. But in the confusion of my discovery that my counterpart was not in town, that there had been some mix up with the questionnaire translation and that the clock was relentlessly ticking, the director kindly brought four "teachers" to work with me. (In a place such as this coastal town, being a teacher signifies a higher level of education than almost anyone around. Also, teachers are likely to have some familiarity with the villages and the local language because they are often sent to work in one village or another.)

It turned out these folks weren't exactly teachers. But all had some connection with the director. At least one of the two women had once been romantically involved with him. We surmised by the strength of her defense

of the director at one point, the other woman must have had some sort of close relationships with him, too. One of the men was a cousin. We never learned the connection with the fourth.

The question then became one of politics (and also one of sheer time pressure). To fire the lot would have been out of the question. Besides, their connection with the director didn't rule them out as being capable. On the other hand, to accept them unquestioningly would have threatened the integrity of the evaluation.

Fearing (rightly, I'm convinced) that these four showed up at the station primarily to earn some money -- all were unemployed and later argued mightily over their salaries and per diems -- the only solution I could come up with on short order was to try to weed out the weak ones by being brutally honest about the difficulty of the work and the life for 15 days in the villages: In the villages it's constantly hot; there are no facilities; the water is bad, shouldn't be drunk; food is always in short supply; asking the same questions over and over is boring.

In the end, they all stayed. We added another man, one in whom we had a good deal of confidence. The interviewers spent 12 days in six villages and completed 93 percent of the planned interviews.

Conclusion: lessons learned

Because of its very nature (called the "turbulent setting of the action program" by Weiss), evaluation research involves the researcher in a number of issues another sort of researcher would not likely face. Among those issues is a set I call "people issues."

While it is probably true that all evaluation researchers have certain people issues in common, it's also probably true that the setting

in a developing country is more turbulent -- or at least less controllable -- than one in the home environment.

Unfortunately, people issues are not now often the stuff of methods courses in programs of mass communication. They should be. As this article illustrates, these are the very issues that may profoundly affect the form the research ultimately takes. A pooling of experiences by evaluation researchers could result in both a much-needed categorization of these issues and a much-needed guide to dealing with those issues.

Clearly, many decisions made in the field are made on the basis of common sense. But Margaret Mead's concern about sending folks off the field "with the expectation" that they will work things out for themselves[13] only begs for trouble. If the results of evaluation research conducted abroad are to gain their rightful position of the literature in our field, then a first step must be to train young people to systematically gather their data and to be open about the obstacles they face. The needed addition to current training in methodology is an emphasis on dealing with the people element.

Endnotes

[1]Margaret Mead, Blackberry Winter (New York: Pocket Books), 1972, p. 153.

[2]Ibid., p. 153.

[3]Several of the books I've found particularly useful are: Carol H. Weiss, Evaluation Research: Methods of Assessing Program Effectiveness (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc.), 1972; Maurice Punch, The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork (Beverly Hills: Sage), 1986; Bryant Kearl (Ed.), Field Data Collection in the Social Sciences: Experiences in Africa and the Middle East (New York: Agricultural Development Council Inc.), 1976; Walter J. Lonner and John W. Berry (Eds.), Field Methods in Cross-Cultural Research (Beverly Hills: Sage), 1986; Leonard Rutman (Ed.), Evaluation Research Methods: A Basic Guide (Beverly Hills: Sage), 1977; David Hawkbridge and John Robinson, Organizing Educational Broadcasting (Paris: The UNESCO Press), 1982.

[4]Rutman, op. cit., p. 16, here taken from Leonard Rutman and Joe Hudson, "Evaluating Human Services: A Process Approach," Beulah R. Compton and Burt Galaway (Eds.), Social Processes (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press), 1974, p. 410.

[5]Weiss, op. cit., Chapter 5.

[6]Ibid., p. 93.

[7]Evaluation Handbook, 2nd Edition (Washington: Agency for International Development), 1974, pp. 44-46.

[8]Punch, op. cit., see particularly Section 3, pp. 49-69.

[9]Rutman, op. cit., Chapter 1.

[10]Beverly Jones, senior program officer, Academy for Educational Development, Washington, telephone conversation, January 1988. Jones estimates that 75 percent to 90 percent of the short-term consultants hired by the various U.S.-based firms are individuals with full-time jobs other than consulting. Most, she says, hold academic positions.

[11]At least 20 project reports resulted from the Basic Village Education Project. Probably the most comprehensive is, "The Basic Village Education Project, Guatemala: Final Report" (Washington: Academy for Educational Development), 1978.

[12]Punch, op. cit., p. .

[13]Mead. op. cit., p. 153.